

IN NOMINE JESU

A STRONG THREEFOLD CORD

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Our sermon for this celebration of Aidan and Mary's one-flesh union in Christ is taken from our inspired readings. Biblically-defined Christian marriage is the union of one man and one woman, through the Holy Spirit, in Christ. It is a work of God that He means to last for a lifetime. The ending of this couple's chosen reading from Ecclesiastes underscores that reality:

If one might prevail against the one (alone), the two will withstand him, and (finally, a) threefold cord (is) not quickly broken apart (Eccl. 4:12).

The Word of God declares, with those words, humanly evident truths. A person who walks alone through life may certainly be attacked from all sides – physically, spiritually, emotionally, economically and so on. When two are joined, they are, in times of trial, able to face such troubles back-to-back, if need be.

For example, in deploying to military conflicts today, unarmed Army Chaplains learn to move through hostile crowds defensively. They may be taught to walk backwards, facing opposite the direction of travel. As the Chaplain does so, he holds onto a loop of the armored vest of his armed assistant. That allows the two to scan for potential threats, front and rear, as well as side-to-side. Should the unarmed man see a threat to the rear, he simply pulls the combatant around to face the hostile forces.

The union of one man and one woman allows them to face life's

challenges together. Sometimes this is done back-to-back. At other times, it is accomplished side-by-side. When one may see something coming to threaten their union, the other can turn him or her to face the challenge. As they remain close, they are strengthened in their resolve to continue this life's journey as one.

Even so, our text for the day speaks of a reinforcement to the union of two. This it does when it declares this reality: *(finally, a) threefold cord (is) not quickly broken apart.* In the Christian marriage alone, God's gift of the Holy Spirit is the third cord. Through Him, a divine bond is cemented in God's highest creatures. This is revealed in another of Mary and Aidan's chosen texts for the day declares:

On account of this, he will leave, man, the father of him and the mother and he will be glued together with the wife of him, and they will be, the two, into one flesh, so then, they no longer remain two but one flesh (Mark 10:7-8).

The Word of God, as it continues to be heard in and throughout a couples' union in the Faith, helps keep the divine glue of the marital bond supple and strong. The Word, heard and received regularly, heals any tears that may begin in the one-flesh union. The Word of God, lived in them through the Holy Spirit, will continue to bind them into a strong threefold cord against the three greatest enemies that will come against them throughout their married life. What is that unholy trinity?

Those foes are the same ones they have already faced with the help of their parents. They are the evil workers who have tempted them as a single man and a single woman who have already left their parents' homes for university and work. The malicious enemies which come against any

Christian marriage are these: this fallen world, the devil and our own sinful natures.

Against those realities which attempt to pull apart their union in God's marriage bonds, in a few moments, they will be bound together by the Word of God. As they confess His word, they will respond to it with their own covenantal promises. From then on, they will be free to face all of life's sorrows, challenges, struggles, trials and temptations. They will be empowered to say and enact these wonderful words, "I forgive you!" That is how they will display to one another the essence of divine love which is lived out following words such as you heard today:

Voluntarily submitting to one another in fear of Christ (Eph. 5:21).

Forgiveness, genuine and lived out, is discovered in true submission to the Word of God in Christ. Freely submitting to God and one another through Holy Absolution lies behind that which the world thinks is the greatest confession in marriage: "I love you." "You are forgiven," is to be spoken with no more reminders of whatever sin may have been committed. This includes such slights as folding towels wrong; not tucking in (or tucking in) the corners of the bedsheets; overspending or underspending on something important; whatever may cause offense.

The words and actions of forgiveness are true love lived out in a Christian marriage. They are the enlivened actions which, in the marriage of a faithful man and a faithful woman, reflect the love of God. Such radiates forth from another of the texts Mary and Aidan desired that you hear today, the Word which declares:

*Gracious and merciful (is) YHWH,
slow to anger and great in unconditional love (Psalm 145:8).*

Aidan and Mary are soon to be liberated to live a glued-together life which is gracious and merciful. This you are free to apply first to one another. You see, God has already shown you His grace and mercy in rescuing you from the unholy trinity so many times. He has repeatedly turned you away from the temptations of the world. (Parents, friends, family members, confidants surely have witnesses that)! The Word of the Lord has moved you from following the deceits of the devil. This He has done by calling you into a united confession of the Faith.

The Spirit of the Living God has begun in your engagement to lead you away from following the greatest of the desires of the flesh: self-satisfaction. Such things He will continue to do through your faithful hearing of His Word. He does so that each of you might begin to learn to sacrifice self for the needs of other.

Through the Word of God, this couple is being equipped to be slow to anger. They may not arrive at that end at the same time. But, by God's grace, they will learn. That is because they will continue to hear of God's setting aside His anger at their sins by placing them on Jesus. Our Psalm of the day proclaims:

*Good (is) YHWH to all,
His compassion (is) upon all He has made (Ps. 145:9).*

As one, the Clevingers are even now being freed from facing life as separate, distinct, individuals. This God does through His repeatedly declaring His unconditional, sacrificial, steadfast love for them. As they

continue to hear of the divine compassion He displays to them, the Word of His love for His Bride, the Church is proclaimed. That is, Jesus shed His blood into death, that His Bride's wedding garments might be cleansed from all stain of sin. Christ gave His body into death that His Bride might live.

As an image of that eternal reality, Aidan has given an earthly promise that he is prepared to die to keep his bride, Mary, in the one true Faith. Soon you will hear the words of covenant he will speak as he places a sign of unity and marital faithfulness on her finger. He will be ever equipped to lead her in Christ as he remains in his spotless wedding garments. That God will do for him as Aidan is daily cleansed anew by the blood of Jesus.

Today, you have been called here first to hear the Word of God for the forgiveness of your sins, and then to witness these two begin life as one new forgiven person. Two definite "others," one man and one woman, so different in body, yet united in the Spirit through Holy Baptism and a common confession of the Faith, will begin to be built up into one mind. That is the Mind of Jesus, which He reveals in part, to be this:

*Truly, I say to all of you, "Whosoever may not have welcomed the kingdom of God as (a) child, definitely not may he go in into her"
(Mark 10:15).*

God brought these individuals into the Faith as children. He sustained them into publicly confessing that Faith as young adults. Now, as man and woman, husband and wife, they will welcome the kingdom of God in a life united by Him.

That will happen as they start to receive all of God's good gifts united together in Christ. From their reception of Jesus, they will receive joys, victories, blessings, and graces. As one person, such will begin for the Clevingers from this Altar Table. May your marriage be fruitful; your household filled with children; your cord of two ever bound strong in the third strand called the Holy Spirit; and your love continue to be displayed in true forgiveness.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus
A Wedding Sermon for Mary and Aidan Clevinger

Psalm 145:1-13; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Ephesians 5:21-33; Mark 10:6-9, 13-16

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria